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CONTEMPORARY SERIES

12-210

DIXIELAND in

H-H-F-F

Gene Mayl's DIXIELAND RHYTHM KINGS

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DIXIELAND in HI-FI

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Bob Hodes, trumpet; Charlie Sonnanstine, trombone; Joe Darensbourg, clarinet; Robin Wetterau, piano; Gene Mayl, tuba; Jack Vastine, banjo and vocals. Dayton, Ohio; Dec., 1953.

Gene Mayl's DIXIELAND RHYTHM KINGS had been in existence for nearly a full decade when these recordings were made. At this writing (1956), they are still going strong. This must entitle them to some sort of longevity award among present-day jazz bands. But this hardly means that there is anything even faintly settled or sedate about these musicians and their music. The average age of the Dixieland Rhythm Kings remains well in the mid-twenties—a fact that could undoubtedly be deduced with no difficulty by anyone listening to just a few bars of the vigorous, youthful jazz they produce here.

Their repertoire, however, is old, often a good deal older than the performers themselves. In this collection, there are a number of tunes that were originally the property of Negro jazz bands of the 1920s, and there is also traditional material that goes back even further than that. But the repertoire, and the basic style in which it was and is played, would seem to have defied the passage of time most successfully. The tunes prove quite able to serve (you might even say *eager* to serve) as vehicles for the unique combination of traditionalism and freshness that makes up the "D.R.K." approach to jazz.

These young men are of course fundamentally dedicated to the spirit and the form of the music that was largely born and bred in New Orleans, that manifested itself so magnificently in Chicago in the '20s, and that lives on today with undiminishing vitality and no geographical limitations. While some very able jazz traditionalists still operate out of New Orleans, a large share of the task of continuing the spirit of early jazz now rests with younger white bands. Very prominent among such groups are the D.R.K., who have staked out a claim as the foremost standard-bearers of the "righteous" tradition in just about all points east of Dayton, Ohio (which is their leader's home town, the band's birthplace, and still their most frequent stamping grounds).

Theirs is very much a happy, rollicking, strutting music. For the band has always been highly aware of one key element in early jazz that is too often overlooked or minimized: the great jazzmen of the '20s were *entertainers*. Out to please their audiences—and themselves as

The term "HI-FI," which is by now a universally accepted short-hand form for "High Fidelity," has come to be applied almost as a matter of course to all new recording. But, as many discriminating listeners know, the term can be used most loosely and is applied as a catch-all generalization to recorded material of what is actually widely (and wildly) varying degrees of faithfulness to the original sound. In the present case, "HI-FI" is used with a feeling of full confidence, because the recording was handled by E. D. Nunn, of Saukville, Wisconsin, one of the country's leading recording engineers and a true perfectionist in the audio field, well-known to high fidelity enthusiasts as the producer of Audiophile Records. Two Stevens "Tru-Sonic" microphones were used; and recording was on a specially redesigned and rebuilt 30-inch speed Magnecorder tape recorder. (Mastering is by Reeves Sound Studios, of New York; pressings by Research Craft Company, of Los Angeles.)

SIDE 1

1. Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home (Hughie Cannon)
2. Sunset Cafe Stomp (Louis Armstrong)
3. Muskrat Ramble (Edward Ory)
4. Weary Blues (Artie Matthews)
5. Big Butter and Egg Man (Percy Venables)
6. Blue Mama's Suicide Wail (Spencer Williams)

SIDE 2

1. Darktown Strutters Ball (Shelton Brooks)
2. St. James Infirmary (traditional)
3. Blues (My Naughty Sweetie Gave to Me) (Swanstone-McCarron-Morgan)
4. Roll, Jordan, Roll (traditional)
5. Sweet Georgia Brown (Bernie-Casey-Pinkard)
6. Red River Valley (traditional)

well—they were not afraid to inject sizeable doses of what has been called "hokum." Also, they were under no restrictions in choosing their repertoire. A great many of the "proper" jazz standards of today are of course just the pop tunes of the '20s, or before, now raised to an elevated status simply because the early jazzmen chose to play with them.

The D.R.K., like their predecessors, see no point in being afraid of tackling any sort of tune. Thus, on the one hand, they do not hesitate to pitch into material that might, in more staid and routine versions, prove either trite or of questionable jazz usefulness. Numbers like *Darktown Strutters Ball* and *Muskrat Ramble* have been used and abused by purveyors of just about every musical style imaginable; others included in this LP (*Red River Valley*; *Roll, Jordan, Roll*) belong outside the usual boundaries of jazz. However, both types are quickly converted into examples of fresh and good-time jazz when this gang lays hands on them and applied the hokum treatment.

At another extreme, the D.R.K. makes so bold as to take up numbers that have, with rare exceptions merely been thought about (rather than *played*) by traditional-jazz groups of today. Presumably, the assumption is that such items as *Sunset Cafe Stomp* and *Naughty Sweetie*

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are too closely identified with a Louis Armstrong or a Jimmy Noone recording of them for anyone else to risk suffering by comparison. But it's one of the Rhythm King's tenets that such fears are nonsense. Quite apart from the dangers of comparison, they consider it a thoroughly bad idea from a musical standpoint to do no more than mimic the notes played by early jazzmen. The D.R.K. avoids strict repetition like the plague it is, and aims instead for a continuation of the jazz *feeling* of the past, played as these youngsters, as inhabitants of the 1950s, choose to express themselves. They pattern their sound on that of the New Orleans-style greats simply because they happen to believe deeply that this is the richest and most valid way of playing jazz, that it forms the best possible foundation on which to build their own music.

Gene Mayl and the brilliant, deep-down trombonist, Charlie Sonnanstine, have kept these points firmly in mind ever since they began playing together, at very tender ages, in the early 1940s. In the past decade, although the band has undergone many shifts in personnel, it has always included Mayl and usually Sonnanstine. The musicians who have joined with them have almost invariably shared their musical concepts and tastes. For example, of the lineup on this LP, Bob Hodes and Robin Wetterau had both played together in the New York area for some time before joining the D.R.K., in such tradition-minded groups as Bob Thompson's Dixieland Foot Warmers and Hodes' Red Onion Jazz Band. Clarinetist Joe Darensbourg, a native of New Orleans, had been a member of Kid Ory's band on the West Coast.

The D.R.K. can also be heard on two ten-inch *Riverside* albums. The first of these is by largely different personnel; the second is from the same recording session as the present 12-inch LP, but includes four selections that do not appear here:

Gene Mayl's DIXIELAND RHYTHM KINGS (RLP 2504)

"New Orleans Jazz Party"—DIXIELAND RHYTHM KINGS (RLP 2505)

Several twelve-inch LPs in the *Riverside* "Contemporary Series" offer outstanding recent examples of jazz in a Dixieland or New Orleans vein. These include:

JOE SULLIVAN: New Solos by an Old Master (RLP 12-202)

RAGTIME!—Tony Parenti's Ragtime Band and Raggickers Trio (RLP 12-205)

GEORGE LEWIS Quartet and Band (RLP 12-207)

WILD BILL DAVISON: Sweet and Hot (RLP 12-211)

RALPH SUTTON; piano solos, with George Wetling, drums (RLP 12-212)

San Francisco Style: LU WATTERS and BOB HELM (RLP 12-213)



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Dixieland Rhythm Kings

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SIDE
1

LONG PLAYING

MICROGROOVE

1. BILL BAILEY
2. SUNSET CAFE STOMP
3. MUSCRAT RAMBLE
4. WEARY BLUES
5. BIG BUTTER AND EGG MAN
5. BLUE MAMA'S SUICIDE WAIL

Bob Hodes, trumpet; Charlie Sonnanstine, trombone;
Joe Darensbourg, clarinet; Robin Wetterau, piano;
Gene Mayl, tuba; Jack Vastine, banjo and vocals.

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Dixieland Rhythm Kings

MICROGROOVE

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SIDE
2

1. DARKTOWN STRUTTERS BALL
2. ST. JAMES INFIRMARY
3. BLUES MY NAUGHTY SWEETIE GAVE TO ME
4. ROLL, JORDAN, ROLL
5. SWEET GEORGIA BROWN
6. RED RIVER VALLEY

Bob Hodes, trumpet; Charlie Sonnanstine, trombone;
Joe Darensbourg, clarinet; Robin Wetterau, piano;
Gene Mayl, tuba; Jack Vastine, banjo and vocals.

(RLP 12-210 B)

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